
A S S O C I A T E D B A P T I S T P R E S S

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Proposal would change
pattern of giving in Texas

DALLAS (ABP) -- Texas Baptists, largest funders of Southern Baptist missions worldwide, may keep a lot more of their money at home under a historic plan now under consideration.

Under the proposal, being studied by a special committee, all missions contributions from a Texas Baptist church would stay in the state convention unless the church specifies otherwise.

Currently the Baptist General Convention of Texas automatically sends about 37 percent of all undesignated receipts to the national coffers of the Southern Baptist Convention -- \$21 million in 1993. Since those funds account for about 15 percent of all SBC funding, such a change would have a major impact on the denomination's funding.

The proposal is one of several suggestions being considered by the Cooperative Missions Giving Study Committee, formed last year to consider how to "enhance cooperative missions giving in Texas." The committee's recommendations will be presented for approval to the state convention, which meets in Amarillo Oct. 31-Nov. 1.

No recommendation has been agreed upon and probably will not be until the committee's last scheduled meeting July 29. But the idea of a Cooperative Program with a focus on Texas Baptist causes was the consensus favorite among the committee's 22 members during a meeting in April.

The historic proposal in effect would redefine the Cooperative Program for Texas Baptists. Gifts for the Texas convention's Cooperative Program budget and those designated for worldwide Baptist causes all would be considered "Cooperative Program" gifts. Each church would be required to designate how its gifts beyond Texas Baptist causes would be distributed.

Funds designated for "worldwide Baptist causes" could include a variety of things, such as the Southern Baptist Convention, the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship or any other Baptist entity.

Morris Chapman, president of the SBC Executive Committee, said the Texas proposal is "a far cry from what Southern Baptists have known, cherished and practiced."

"I am surprised that a Texas committee appears to be so ready to abandon something which has been greatly used of God to fulfill the Great Commission," Chapman said in a statement.

Still, Chapman said, support for SBC causes could increase under the Texas plan. "This proposal is an open invitation to Southern Baptist churches in Texas to become more directly involved in SBC missions by sending their gifts directly to support SBC world missions and ministries," he wrote.

Texas Baptists are not the only ones tinkering with cooperative giving. Baptists in Virginia, for instance, offer churches three budget options, including one that supports the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship and not the SBC.

Interest in the Texas committee's work has intensified since Russell Dilday was fired by the conservative trustees of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary March 9. Critics of the firing at the Texas seminary have called for Baptists in the state to voice their displeasure by withholding their financial support of the SBC, which has been controlled by conservatives since 1979.

The 22-member Texas committee, chaired by Cecil Ray of Georgetown, was appointed by the 1993 state convention on a motion by Ben Loring, pastor of First Church of Amarillo, historically one of the strongest supporters of the Cooperative Program. Loring, a Fellowship leader, was asked to speak to the committee's April meeting to explain why he made the motion.

Asked what he meant by "enhance cooperative missions giving," the Amarillo pastor said he meant that missions giving be more encouraged and affirmed rather than increased.

Loring noted that his church gave more money to Southern Baptist causes -- \$191,660 -- than Second Baptist Church of Houston, whose pastor, Ed Young, is president of the SBC. However, since most of that SBC money was channelled through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, it has been "devalued," Loring said.

The decision to send its "out-of-state mission money" through the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, Loring said, was an "agonizing decision" for the church, a "protest move" to voice its disagreement, primarily with the SBC Executive Committee and some of its decisions.

Loring urged the Texas committee to consider a system of "fairness" in recognizing cooperative gifts -- one that respects the autonomy of the local church in its mission-giving decisions and that encourages giving rather than intimidates a church that may choose other avenues of support.

The committee's next meeting is scheduled for May 23 in Dallas.

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-- By Toby Druin and Greg Warner

Southwestern professor retiring
to protest Dilday firing

By Bob Allen

FORT WORTH, Texas (ABP) -- A Southwestern Seminary faculty member is leaving the Fort Worth, Texas, school to protest President Russell Dilday's

firing.

Jack Coldiron, 67, distinguished professor of voice, wrote trustees April 13 informing them he will retire in July after teaching 31 years in the seminary's School of Church Music.

Coldiron addressed the letter to Fort Worth pastor Miles Seaborn, who chairs a committee on the seminary's board of trustees seeking a successor to Dilday, and sent copies to each of the board's 40 members. The trustees

voted 26-7 to fire Dilday March 9 after he refused to accept a severance package offered by trustee leaders requiring him to retire immediately.

Coldiron told Seaborn that despite a lifetime of nurture from the Southern Baptist Convention, his "belief and confidence" in the convention "have been gradually eroded" as conservatives now controlling the 15.4 million-member convention have effected their reforms. With the Dilday firing, "the last vestige of trust was ripped apart and I have decided it is impossible for me to work with you any longer," he wrote.

"My heart is broken as I consider what will become of the fine institution which I have known for so many years," Coldiron continued. "Therefore I have presented my letter of intent to retire in July 1994."

Southwestern's faculty have sided with Dilday in public statements, most recently in an ad in the April 20 Baptist Standard newspaper defending the ousted president against trustee charges that he holds liberal views about the Bible. But to date Coldiron is the only teacher to leave in protest.

Coldiron told Associated Baptist Press he had only recently informed the music school's dean he intended to remain on faculty until 1997 or 1998. Beginning with last October's board meeting, however, he said he "felt that things had taken a more ominous turn" and "began to feel then that maybe my continuance here would not be a possibility."

Dilday's firing solidified that feeling, he said. Coldiron said he wrote Dean James McKinney a letter of intent to retire "I think the day following Dr. Dilday's firing."

He said he does not know if other faculty members might also depart. "I really don't know of any other intentions on anyone's' part," he said. "It is not something that has been discussed, particularly among our faculty." But such a decision "is a personal thing," he added. "I think if people are considering it, they are keeping their counsel."

Coldiron said he wrote the trustees in response to a letter from Seaborn inviting him and other faculty members to recommend a successor to Dilday, 63, president of the seminary since 1978. He labeled that request "a mockery."

As a member of the music school faculty, "I have already been demeaned and criticized for my lack of understanding of what the churches need and for disregarding the suggestions of trustees for updating the curriculum of the school to meet the current needs of our constituents," he wrote.

Coldiron cited public criticism of the music school by trustees, who charged the faculty was reluctant to shift the school's focus from an emphasis on classical, "high church" styles to more popular, contemporary modes. That reluctance, the trustees said, was indicative of the kind of "gridlock" that existed between trustees and administration under Dilday.

Coldiron said faculty members have been "dubbed hard-nosed and uncooperative," while their "good faith actions" in response to trustee criticism were "utterly ignored," the letter continued.

"Why would you now look to us for recommendations?" he asked Seaborn.

Coldiron, however, did recommend a candidate to Seaborn. "His name is Russell Dilday," the letter said.

Ralph Pulley, chairman of trustees, had nice things to say about Coldiron. "Certainly we appreciate his years of service to Southwestern

Seminary," Pulley told Associated Baptist Press. "We know of his devotion to the School of Music and our Lord . We certainly will honor his decision to retire and wish him well."

Coldiron said he decided to write the trustees because "I wanted them to know of my feelings and of the deep concerns of my heart and also the background on which I base my life and my feeling of how Christians ought to behave."

Coldiron said the firing has had a "tragic" impact on the campus. "It's hard to express the amount of real concern, sorrow in peoples hearts around here," he said. He said he is particularly concerned about students "who are feeling a desperation. They don't know what to do and frankly I can't give them a lot of encouragement."

"I certainly am not telling them to leave. I am telling them, 'You have maybe a couple of years before things change that drastically, but I can't guarantee that,'" he said.

In his letter, Coldiron charged "capricious and vicious actions" by trustees "have brought pain and outrage into the lives of countless thousands and have certainly diminished the work of the Lord in our time."

"The convention I once knew is no more," he wrote. "The school which I have revered and served for so many years is irreparably damaged."

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Missouri executive board
criticizes Dilday firing

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- The executive board of the Missouri Baptist Convention went on record April 12 to criticize trustees of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary for firing President Russell Dilday.

The board, at the close of a quarterly meeting at Windemere, the Missouri Baptist assembly located on the Lake of the Ozarks, voted 31-6 to send a letter to trustees of the Fort Worth, Texas,-based seminary to protest the manner of the March 9 firing. After giving Dilday passing marks on an administrative evaluation and denying there was an effort to fire him, trustee leaders the next day reportedly offered Dilday an ultimatum of immediate retirement or dismissal. The full board, meeting in executive session, voted 26-7 to fire Dilday, seminary president since 1978. Within minutes, the locks had been changed to the president's office and his computer access code had been changed.

Ray Crews, pastor of First Baptist Church, Carthage, presented the motion that the Missouri board issue the protest. He told of a new convert in his church -- an older man who after reading of Dilday's firing commented, "Pastor, this is nothing but dirty politics; I didn't know Christian men did this."

Members of the board debated whether the statement is proper. Benny King, a St. Louis director of missions, said the state executive board should not tell a national board how to run its business. "We wouldn't like it if they did it to us," he said.

The Southwestern controversy "is not our fight," said Paul Brooks, pastor of First Baptist Church, Raytown. "I don't think it's helpful for this board to drag SBC political problems into this state," he said.

Jim Jeffries, pastor of National Heights Baptist Church in Springfield, said it is proper to "decry unChristian behavior" as the

executive board had done in the past with action criticizing the Foreign Mission Board. "We're not saying 'hire him back,' " Jeffries said. "We're saying 'this is not the right way to do it.' "

Missouri Baptist Convention President T.O. Spicer will write the letter with input from other convention officers, he said. A separate letter of support will be written to Dilday. Copies of both letters will be sent to the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee.

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-- By Tim Palmer

Mohler outlines objectives
for Southern Seminary

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- The future of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary became clearer last week as new President Albert Mohler outlined for trustees 40 program objectives to be accomplished in the next 18 months.

Trustees heartily endorsed the report, and then moved to support it by approving a \$17.5 million budget for 1994-95 and pledging to raise \$100,000 in gifts to the seminary themselves.

The camaraderie and humor displayed at this year's spring meeting stood in stark contrast to last spring's meeting, which ended with three trustees resigning in protest of the board's actions. With those resignations, dissenting voices on the conservative-led board virtually were eliminated.

And with the transition last summer from former President Roy Honeycutt to Mohler, conservative trustees believe they gained leadership more sympathetic to their concerns. Throughout this year's spring meeting, trustees were profuse in their praise of Mohler's first eight months in office.

Mohler presented trustees with a document titled "Foundation '95," which outlines 16 "central commitments" and 40 "program objectives" to be accomplished by the end of 1995.

The central commitments largely mirror statements Mohler has made previously, such as reaffirming the seminary's commitment to the local church, making Southern Seminary the flagship seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention and streamlining seminary administration to better serve changing needs.

One of the new items found in the central commitments is Mohler's desire to create a core curriculum which would be required of all master's-level students in the seminary's five schools. Such a core curriculum would be unique among American seminaries, he said.

Another new item is Mohler's vision to "celebrate the growing ethnic, racial and national diversity of the seminary community."

Some of the 40 program objectives already have been accomplished, some were acted on by trustees during this meeting and others are yet to be fulfilled.

Among the objectives:

-- A stronger emphasis on the spiritual development of students

through discipleship and prayer ministries.

- Creation of a doctor of missiology degree.
- Launching an annual Pastors' School.
- Computerizing the seminary library's catalog system.
- Cooperating with "no organization, convention or entity in competition with" the SBC and its Cooperative Program unified missions budget.

The most potentially controversial objective on Mohler's list is a plan to replace the current "Faculty-Staff Manual" with a new "Administrative and Academic Manual of Policy."

The current manual is the official document outlining what is required and allowed of seminary employees. It includes procedures for termination and discipline of faculty.

Such issues have been the source of previous tension between the seminary's conservative-led board and more moderately inclined faculty.

In his report to trustees, Mohler said his administration seeks a "recovery" of theological tradition, classical theological education, congregational commitment, denominational identity, institutional vision and spiritual vitality.

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Southern Seminary
raises student fees

By Mark Wingfield

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (ABP) -- There's good news and bad news for students in the Boyce Bible School program of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The good news: Boyce will now offer an associate of arts degree, which will be more portable and prestigious than the current diploma.

The bad news: It's going to cost more.

Trustees of the Louisville seminary last week approved the new associate degree, along with sweeping changes in the way matriculation fees are calculated both for Boyce students and for students enrolled in the seminary's master's and doctoral programs.

The associate of arts degree will require only two additional courses beyond requirements for the current Boyce diploma. Southern Seminary President Albert Mohler stressed to trustees that the school does not want to get in the business of awarding bachelor's degrees.

Boyce's program will continue to serve students 21 years of age and older, while encouraging younger students to attend a four-year college or university. Eighteen hours of the 64-hour degree program must be taken on campus. Boyce operates 25 off-campus centers across the United States.

Under the new price structure, Boyce students on the Louisville campus will pay a \$350 matriculation fee per semester, plus \$75 per course. Currently, on-campus Boyce students pay a \$550 matriculation fee per semester, regardless of course load.

The difference for a typical student taking four courses will be about \$100 per semester, or an 18 percent increase.

Under the new structure, students at off-campus Boyce centers will pay a matriculation fee of \$100 per semester, plus \$50 per course. Currently, off-campus students pay \$40 per credit hour. This could mean either an increase or decrease, depending on the number of courses a student normally takes.

Students enrolled in Southern's primary master's and doctoral programs also face increases beginning next fall.

On the master's degree level, Southern Baptist students will pay a \$500 matriculation fee per semester, plus \$75 per course, up to a maximum of \$950 per semester. Non-Southern Baptist students will pay double those fees.

Southern Baptist students will be defined as those who are members of congregations which qualify as cooperating churches eligible for representation at Southern Baptist Convention annual meetings, Mohler explained.

The new structure will mean an increase of \$150 per semester, or 23 percent, for a typical student taking four courses.

New fees for Southern Baptist doctoral students will be \$900 per semester for the doctor of ministry program and \$1,500 per semester for research doctorates such as the doctor of philosophy, doctor of education and doctor of musical arts.

Other seminary fees will increase from 3 percent to 10 percent.

Mohler told trustees the increases are necessary to keep the seminary operating in the black and are in line with the fees being charged by the five other Southern Baptist seminaries. The fees remain substantially lower than those charged by non-Southern Baptist seminaries, he noted.

In other action, trustees:

-- Welcomed Dennis Williams as new dean of the Christian education school and elected him professor of Christian education with tenure.

-- Approved a \$17.5 million budget for 1994-95, a 6.6 percent increase over the current year. The budget shifts funds in several areas to accommodate creation of the new Billy Graham School of Missions, Evangelism and Church Growth. It projects a slight decline in contributions through the Southern Baptist Convention's Cooperative Program. The budget also removes any projection of income from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, although some churches and individuals continue to channel money to the seminary through the moderate-backed organization.

-- Set a goal of raising \$100,000 in contributions from trustees in the next year.

-- Approved a new policy for faculty and staff on disciplinary action short of dismissal.

-- Rescinded an action taken last April to create a board of overseers for the Northeastern Baptist School of Ministry.

-- Revised bylaws of Boyce Bible School to require all personnel to affirm the seminary's Abstract of Principles, as well as the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message statement.

-- Appointed a committee to study the seminary's investment policy related to social issues. The seminary already has a prohibition against investing in companies with interests in gambling, tobacco, alcohol, pornography or abortion.

-- Heard progress reports on plans to construct a north wing on the Honeycutt Student Center, providing new space for a cafeteria, conference rooms and a banquet hall. Trustees also heard an initial report on the feasibility of converting Rice Hall and Judson Hall, which are located adjacent to the student center, into guest housing for conferences.

-- Heard reports that applications for enrollment are up 78 percent over the same time last year, that applications for the PhD program are up to 56 this year, compared to 14 last year; and that the seminary has received nearly \$8 million in major gifts since Aug. 1.

-- Approved a policy on paid work outside the seminary which encourages faculty to work in local churches but establishes a process to review long-term commitments annually.

-- Re-elected the current slate of officers, including chairman Rick White of Tennessee, first vice chairman John Allen of Mississippi, second vice chairman David Miller of Arkansas and secretary John Hicks of Kentucky.

At the conclusion of the meeting, chairman Rick White released a two-page statement on recent expenditures on the seminary president's home. The report came seven months after the Western Recorder, newsjournal of Kentucky Baptists, unsuccessfully sought details of the extensive renovations done to the home before Mohler and his family moved in.

Some seminary students and alumni had expressed concern about the cost of the renovations on the president's home and office suite, on the heels of an over-budget presidential search process and other major expenses related to the presidential transition.

White told trustees most of the \$134,673 in renovations done this year would have been necessary regardless of who was president, due to the poor condition of the facility, built in 1913. The brief period the home was empty before the Mohlers moved in was an ideal time for the work to be done, he said.

The statement reports \$83,459 in contingency funds were spent on "accelerated deferred maintenance," such as plumbing, painting, storm doors and windows, carpeting, basement waterproofing, alarm and telephone systems, furnace, and various woodwork and columns.

Another \$51,214 was spent to create usable space in the basement, where Mohler's office and extensive library are housed, and to install a security fence enclosing a portion of the back yard.

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Dilday firing sparks interest
in Fellowship meeting

By Bob Allen

ATLANTA (ABP) -- Though it is unknown whether he will even attend, fired seminary president Russell Dilday is expected to be a big draw to the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship's 1994 general assembly May 5-7 in Greensboro, N.C.

Dilday's March 9 firing as president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary sparked a surge in inquiries about the Fellowship's upcoming national gathering, said David Wilkinson, communications coordinator for the Atlanta-based Fellowship.

Though Wilkinson is uncertain about how precisely those calls and letters will translate into attendance, he predicts the Fellowship's fourth annual gathering will exceed an attendance record of 7,000 established last year.

Wilkinson said most of the inquiries have come from the states of Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas, the three states closest in proximity to Southwestern and the states in which the bulk of the seminary's alumni and other supporters live. "My guess is if our meeting were in Texas this year the increase would be remarkable," he said.

Last year's general assembly in Birmingham, Ala., reported a registration of about 5,100 and an estimated attendance of 7,000 at the largest session, which featured an address by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter.

Wilkinson said as of April 21 about 1,600 people had pre-registered for the assembly. This is the first year a pre-registration option has been

offered, so there is no history to compare pre-registration and attendance totals.

Wilkinson also noted "a corresponding surge" in registrations for lodging in Greensboro hotel blocks reserved for the assembly after Dilday's firing. Hotel registration for Greensboro had surpassed the total for last year's Birmingham meeting by early January.

Wilkinson said Dilday has received an official invitation to attend the assembly, but he has not yet said if he will come. Associated Baptist Press attempted to reach Dilday April 21, but he was unavailable.

Wilkinson said Dilday would experience "affirmation he would enjoy as part of this meeting." "Many of these people have been his supporters over the years," he added.

The theme of this year's general assembly is "Pressing Toward the Mark," a citation from Philipppians 3:14.

Preachers for the meeting include William Jones, pastor of Bethany Baptist Church, Brooklyn, N.Y., former president of the National Baptist Convention and founder of the National Black Pastors' Conference; Hardy Clemons, the Fellowship's current moderator and pastor of First Baptist Church, Greenville, S.C.; Michael Massar, senior minister at First Baptist Church, Clemson, S.C., and Julie Pennington-Russell, pastor of 19th Avenue Baptist Church, San Francisco, Calif.

William Hull, provost of Samford University in Birmingham, Ala., will deliver three theme interpretations .

Among worship leaders will be mime artist Doug Berky of Greenville and songwriter-humorist Rod McClendon from Greer, S.C.

For the first time, the Fellowship will sponsor a local mission project in conjunction with the general assembly . In a joint venture with Habitat for Humanity, an international, ecumenical ministry dedicated to providing affordable housing for low-income individuals, Fellowship volunteers will attempt to build seven houses in the two days before the general assembly. Teams up to 100-strong will work in half-day shifts on Wednesday and Thursday.

The Fellowship has allocated \$40,000 for construction of one home. Fellowship supporters in North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia are raising funds for a second. Habitat for Humanity International is funding a third and the Greensboro Habitat affiliate is seeking sponsorship for four others.

Habitat for Humanity founder and president Millard Fuller will speak to the volunteers at a local missions rally at First Presbyterian Church Wednesday evening.

Also preceding the general assembly will be three "institutes" on conflict management, spouse abuse and homosexuality.

During the assembly about 90 "breakout" sessions will cover topics related to the Fellowship, needs of local churches, and social and theological issues.

In a business session, the assembly will consider a budget for the first six months of 1995, as the Fellowship shifts from a calendar-year to fiscal-year accounting system. The proposed budget anticipates revenue of \$8.9 million during the first half of 1995, with \$5.6 million earmarked for Fellowship missions and ministries.

A Friday night "global missions celebration" will feature a report by Keith Parks, Fellowship missions coordinator, and the appointment and "blessing" of new missionaries by assembly participants.

Kentucky Fellowship event
focuses on religious liberty

By Marv Knox

ERLANGER, Ky. (ABP) -- Baptists must work to preserve religious liberty in America, participants at the Kentucky Baptist Fellowship annual meeting were told.

"Proclaim Liberty" was the theme for the meeting, which attracted about 175 moderate Baptists to Erlanger Baptist Church in Erlanger, Ky., April 16.

"There was a time when Baptists were very concerned about religious liberty and separation between Baptists and (national) flags," said Allen Walworth, pastor of First Baptist Church in Huntsville, Ala.

That was when Baptists were a minority "on the outside of the plexiglass of power looking in." But the perspective has changed for many Baptists, now that they are a majority group, he added, quoting historian Martin Marty's description of Baptists as "the Catholic Church of the South."

As a minority group, Baptists were concerned for religious tolerance, he said, noting Baptists were pivotal in urging James Madison to include the religion clauses in the First Amendment.

Now, however, many Baptists want to flex their majority-status muscles by forcing others to conform to their views, he charged. And he warned, "It is important to remember that what was right when you were small is right when you are large."

As a majority religion, Baptists must play a special role in preserving religious liberty, Walworth stressed. "We have the privilege to defend it; we have the power to destroy it."

Protecting religious liberty is the ongoing concern of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, said James Dunn, executive director of the Washington-based organization.

People who have been "baptistified" value religious liberty, Dunn said, explaining they are

Dunn praised the group of Kentucky Baptists who launched a plan to raise a \$200,000 endowment for the Baptist Joint Committee after the Kentucky Baptist Convention reversed its decision to create a similar fund.

Later in the day, the Kentucky Fellowship voted unanimously to endorse the endowment.

Participants also heard a report from the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, a 3-year-old organization of moderate Southern Baptists disaffected by the rightward shift of their national convention.

"When people ask me how the Fellowship is doing, I say as with Jesus, 'Come and see,'" reported David Wilkinson, the organization's communications coordinator. He reported the Fellowship now sponsors 31 missionaries who work primarily with groups of people unreached by the Christian gospel.

He described ministries to Gypsies in eastern Europe, a multinational community in Atlanta and victims of Hurricane Andrew in Miami.

Acknowledging the Fellowship began as a reaction to denominational strife, he insisted it is growing, "not as a reaction to the SBC, but due to the winsomeness of the Fellowship."

The Kentucky Fellowship's outgoing president, Steve Hadden, also noted the movement was founded as a reaction to SBC discord.

"We are children of a domestic dispute," said Hadden, pastor of Faith Baptist Church in Georgetown. "We did not create this family problem. We

were born because of this problem."

Stressing that the controversy out of which the Fellowship was born was a national dispute, he warned that it has implications for the Kentucky Baptist Convention.

"While the battle for the SBC is over, it is spreading to the KBC as promised," he said. "We should give the inquisitors credit for keeping their promise: 'First the SBC, then the states.'"

While noting political events within the denomination sometimes call for reaction, Hadden urged the Kentucky Fellowship to do more.

He urged the Fellowship to stand firm in support for the KBC and its agencies and institutions and to "cry out and say something" when they are attacked.

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Midwestern trustees pledge cooperation
during retiring president's final years

KANSAS CITY, Mo. (ABP) -- Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary trustees have pledged to work with Milton Ferguson during his last two years as president of the Kansas City, Mo., institution.

Ferguson, 65, announced his retirement, effective July 31, 1996, during the opening session of the board of trustees' annual meeting, April 18.

Ferguson said he had discussed his retirement plans over the course of "several months" with trustee Chairman James Jones, evangelism director for the Baptist State Convention of Michigan, and more recently with the board's executive committee. However, he insisted the decision was "totally voluntary and positive in purpose and intent."

Ferguson told trustees he wanted to activate his retirement "in a way and at a time which would facilitate an orderly, effective transition and thereby undergird the stability and the progress of Midwestern Seminary as we move forward into the future."

He said after "prayerfully considering" his retirement plans for several months, he discussed with executive committee members the timing and method that would be in the seminary's best interest. The leaders asked him "for ample time for us to work together in addressing several of the major challenges before us and to allow the trustees opportunity to establish orderly procedures for selection of my successor," he said. "I respect

their judgment in these matters and I will honor their request," he added.

The board of trustees unanimously adopted a resolution April 19 expressing "deep gratitude to the Lord" for Ferguson's "life, his leadership and his ministry" to Midwestern Seminary. They also resolved to "cooperate" with Ferguson in providing an atmosphere in which all seminary constituencies "can work together in confronting the challenges and opportunities of the future."

An earlier statement by the executive committee noted "a profound sense of loss, some uncertainty and a lot of grief" to see Ferguson's tenure come to a close, but also "a profound sense of gratitude" for the president's "effective and capable leadership."

The trustees authorized a five-person committee to outline a search process for a new president. The committee will report at the board's

semiannual meeting, Oct. 17-18.

Board Chairman Jones appointed Dennis Wood, pastor of First Southern Baptist Church in Tempe, Ariz., to serve as the committee's chairman. Trustees elected the other four members of the search procedures committee: Robert Collins, pastor of Plaza Heights Baptist Church in Blue Springs, Mo.; James Dobbs, an attorney in Columbus, Ohio; Ronnie Rogers, pastor of Lakeside Baptist Church in Hot Springs, Ark.; and Stoney Shaw, pastor of Living Water Community Church in St. Louis, Mo.

Like other SBC agencies, Midwestern's recent history has been marked by disputes between the president and an increasingly-conservative board of trustees. Unlike some sister institutions, however, it has avoided for the most part confrontational politics which center on the personality of the president

Midwestern's smooth leadership transition contrasted sharply with a similar change at a sister seminary. At Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, a small group of trustees reportedly approached that school's 63-year-old president in March with the intent of forcing him to retire. But the president, Russell Dilday, rebuffed a retirement offer and was fired.

A week later, Landrum Leavell, 67, longtime president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, reached an amicable agreement with trustees to retire in 1996.

When successors to Dilday, Leavell and Ferguson are named, the presidents of all six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries will have been elected since conservatives gained control of the SBC in 1979.

While interest in Ferguson's retirement date had piqued among Midwestern trustees, observers say they wanted to avoid a public confrontation like Southwestern's and that the issue would not have surfaced at the March meeting had Ferguson not initiated it.

Ferguson told trustees he will not be a "lame duck" until his presidency ends. "I want you to know that I'm not withdrawing into a rocking chair to ride out the next two years," he said. "I intend to be aggressively, assertively acting in a leadership role. I intend to be pushing forward--pushing you as trustees, pushing the administration, faculty and staff, enlisting the support of the alumni, and acting as if I were a newly-inaugurated president, eager to go."

His voice breaking with emotion, Ferguson pledged, "I intend for these last two years to be the best years that I have to give. ... It is my intent and my prayer that this transition be Midwestern's finest hour."

Trustees responded to Ferguson's report with a standing ovation.

Richard Proctor, first vice chairman of the board and a municipal court judge from Wynne, Ark., presented a response from the executive committee. "We look forward with anticipation to the additional two years of leadership and fellowship that he will provide for us," Proctor said.

Ferguson has been president of Midwestern Seminary 21 of the school's 37-year history. He is the second person to hold the position.

Before assuming the Midwestern presidency in 1973, Ferguson taught theology and philosophy of religion at Southwestern Seminary. He holds bachelor's and doctor's degrees from Southwestern and a bachelor's degree from Oklahoma Baptist University.

Ferguson is a native of Harrah, Okla. He and his wife, Bettie Fae, have two grown daughters. A third daughter died in 1980.

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-- By Bob Allen. Brenda Sanders contributed to this story.

Two Texas churches carry on
after tornado hits building

By Ken Camp

DALLAS (ABP) -- Despite losing the building they shared in an April 15 tornado, two Texas Baptist congregations promise business as usual.

"We just lost a building -- we are the church," Robert Williams, interim pastor of Community Baptist Church in Crosby, Texas, told about 150 worshipers who met for an open-air service April 17 on the site where their meeting house had been destroyed two days earlier.

At least 20 people were injured and one 67-year-old woman was killed by the tornado that swept through Crosby, a town about 25 miles northeast of Houston. The storm damaged or destroyed about 100 houses and mobile homes.

Among buildings leveled by the twister were facilities of Community Baptist Church and its Hispanic mission, Comunidad.

The following Sunday, Williams and Gary Sloan, pastor of Comunidad Baptist Mission, led a bilingual, joint worship service of the two congregations on the parking lot of the church property.

Using a flatbed trailer as his rostrum, Williams preached not far from the rubble that been their church facility.

"We're going go through trials and tribulations," he said. "This is not the first, and it won't be the last. But I'd a whole lot rather go through a trial with Christ that go through it without Him."

Two people made professions of faith in Jesus Christ at the service, and three families joined the church.

"It's hard to get down when you see people saved and join the church -- even when there's not a church building for them to go into," Williams said.

"We don't even have a baptistry now. We'll just have to baptize them in Lake Houston or a swimming pool, I guess."

While many of their homes sustained damage, no members of the church were killed and only one woman sustained serious injury, he noted.

Williams challenged the congregation to see the disaster as "a wonderful opportunity" to minister and witness to their neighbors.

"There were a lot of people who don't come to church anymore who were there for the service, and a lot of people from the community," said Gloria Sloan, the mission pastor's wife.

Before the disaster, Comunidad Mission already had purchased a church site at a location central to Crosby's Spanish-speaking population, and a building had been moved onto the property. Members of the mission now plan to meet on April 24 for the first time at their new home, ahead of an earlier schedule.

"We have electricity, but no water at this point," Mrs. Sloan said. "But we have more than Community Church right now. At least we have four walls and a roof over our heads."

"As my husband told our members on Sunday, 'We got kicked out of the nest a little earlier than we had expected, but that just means we'll have to learn to fly.'"

Community Baptist Church will continue to meet on the site of their former building in a tent, and portable buildings will be secured for education space, according to Lee Walker, director of missions for San Jacinto Baptist Association.

Williams hopes the church will be able to build again on the existing

foundation. But regardless of the concrete slab's condition, he said he is sure of one thing: "We know the foundation is secure. Jesus is the foundation."

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